

What Makes a Story Newsworthy?

News can be defined as *"Newsworthy information about recent events or happenings, especially as reported by news media"*. But what makes news newsworthy?

There is a list of five factors, detailed below, which are considered when deciding if a story is newsworthy. When an editor needs to decide whether to run with a particular story, s/he will ask how well the story meets each of these criteria. Normally, a story should perform well in at least two areas.

Naturally, competition plays a part. If there are a lot of newsworthy stories on a particular day then some stories will be dropped. Although some stories can be delayed until a new slot becomes available, time-sensitive news will often be dropped permanently.

⇒ **Timing**

The word *news* means exactly that - things which are *new*. Topics which are current are good news. Consumers are used to receiving the latest updates, and there is so much news about that old news is quickly discarded.

A story with only average interest needs to be told quickly if it is to be told at all. If it happened today, it's news. If the same thing happened last week, it's no longer interesting.

⇒ **Significance**

The number of people affected by the story is important. A plane crash in which hundreds of people died is more significant than a crash killing a dozen.

⇒ **Proximity**

Stories which happen near to us have more significance. The closer the story to home, the more newsworthy it is. For someone living in France, a major plane crash in the USA has a similar news value to a small plane crash near Paris.

Note that proximity doesn't have to mean geographical distance. Stories from countries with which we have a particular bond or similarity have the same effect. For example, Australians would be expected to relate more to a story from a distant Western nation than a story from a much closer Asian country.

How to Write a News Story

Here's something very few people realise: Writing news stories isn't particularly difficult. It does take practice and not everyone will be an expert but if you follow the guidelines below you should be able to create effective news items without too much stress.

⇒ The Five "W"s and the "H"

This is the crux of all news - you need to know five things:

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

Any good news story provides answers to each of these questions. You must drill these into your brain and they must become second nature.

For example, if you wish to cover a story about a local sports team entering a competition you will need to answer these questions:

- **Who** is the team? Who is the coach? Who are the prominent players? Who are the supporters?
- **What** sport do they play? What is the competition?
- **Where** is the competition? Where is the team normally based?
- **When** is the competition? How long have they been preparing? Are there any other important time factors?
- **Why** are they entering this particular competition? If it's relevant, why does the team exist at all?
- **How** are they going to enter the competition? Do they need to fundraise? How much training and preparation is required? What will they need to do to win?

⇒ The Inverted Pyramid

This refers to the style of journalism which places the most important facts at the beginning and works "down" from there. Ideally, the first paragraph should contain enough information to give the reader a good overview of the entire story. The rest of the article explains and expands on the beginning.

A good approach is to assume that the story might be cut off at any point due to space limitations. Does the story work if the editor only decides to include the first two paragraphs? If not, re-arrange it so that it does.

The same principle can apply to any type of medium.